converted to a Group Home or a Town House, as potentially one less place for him. They added up to a considerable loss, till he virtually had nowhere to live. The available places, the condos, were a kind of nowhere. They were given names that implied downtown funkiness, individuality, even eccentricity, but they looked the same all over, like postal substations circa 1960. Generically ugly and ashamed of it, the one thing that was real about them, their functionality. Or perhaps it was their expensiveness that they were ashamed of, the one thing they didn't share with the modern post office, which at least was efficient, and cheap. These dwellings weren't efficient, or environmentally friendly. They required YUPPIES, to function at all.

Johnny could remember when, to find another room to rent, he would simply go for a walk in the evening, and call at every house that had a FOR RENT sign in the windows. There were a lot of houses. The atmosphere was quite relaxed. Landlords continued to show their rooms till late in the evening, well after dark, till finally the door would be answered by people in pjamas, pointing at their watches. Then he'd stop looking, not in any hurry. There were a lot of houses. Not any more....

The crack house next door was among the last to go, to get absorbed. It had been there a long time, long been a dive. Guests at Oak Ridge or Yucca Flats still picked up their mail, at the Beastly Crack House. Never stopped getting it. They usually didn't get it all. GST cheques and tax refunds were generally intercepted and mysteriously cashed, in other words FORGED. Johnny would hear some fresh intake at Oak Ridge mourning his loss, hear the disappointment in his voice. He'd listen, and recognize the address. Sure enough, the Beastly Crack House.

The rock and roll music used to boom so loud across the lane, tenants of Emile Durkheim House would start pounding on their neighbors' doors, to make them turn it down. They'd go into the lane, to fight it out, and realize. The music was coming from the Beastly Crack House, but none of them would go inside to pound on their doors. Only a woman on the other side ventured in one night, went all the way up to the garret, and told the occupant to TURN IT DOWN. The occupant might have been in shock, because he did.

That woman must have been brave or lucky, because a few months later the owner returned from Cuba and was assaulted by one of the guests. He subsequently declined, and died a few months later. Citizen Hearse's agent immediately made the deceased's sister an offer. It wasn't a very generous one, but it was timely because she badly wanted to get rid of the place, the front porch of which was still cordoned off by yellow Crime Scene tape.

The same families had lived for decades over the stores. The stores changed, but the families remained. Romeo's Thing Store had been Stationary, and Haberdashery. Romeo had his turn with the lady upstairs, like his predecessors, the stationer and the haberdasher. She was a lot older, but so was he, and he was in love. He said so, when he came downstairs again.

There was a very old lady who lived across the street, above an extremely old and battered coin laundry. Johnny would bring his clothes over, late at night. They'd just be finishing in the dryer when the old lady would come downstairs to close up. She'd wipe out some of the machines, which seemed futile since they were so caked with scurrilous grafitti, Johnny used to just sit and read them instead of a book. They were like neighborhood cuneiform, but easier to understand.

The old lady talked to him. She'd been born above the laundry, when it was her father's